

A Comparative Overview to Some Albanian and Italian Spelling Norms



Linguistics

Keywords: spelling mistakes, errors, Italian language, Albanian language, comparative analysis, etc.

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze some of the spelling features of the Albanian and Italian languages. Linguistic is an universal and complex science. Among other issues, spelling and pronunciation are the most difficult and complex problems when it comes in finding a stable solution. Albanian language, being one of the most unique languages in the world has maintained its ease in spelling. However in the last two decades, there are a lot of rising issues concerning some of the spelling norms. On the other hand, the facility by which the Italian language can be spelled is attributed to its Latin origin. By the use of an comparative analysis, we are presenting some of the most frequent mistakes encountered among Albanian pupils studying Italian as a foreign language. Doing so, we would like to stress three of the most important findings. Firstly, the spelling of the digraphs and trigraphs of the Italian language; secondly, the realization of the same phoneme, using different graphemes or digraphs and trigraphs as well and thirdly, the double consonants.

Introduction

In the Albanian language there is a satisfactory compatibility between the orthography and pronunciation. However, it is a well known fact that the phonetic principle cannot be taken as an absolute one, because of the diversity of the sounds, as well as the emotional state, age and gender of the speaker in a particular language.

The Albanian language has an equal number of phonemes and letters. This applies only in terms of concrete production of the sounds and not to their combinations into larger units, such as a syllable, word or phrase during the connected speech.

Prof. Memushaj in his book “Gjuha shqipe në shtratin e Prokrusitit” lists a number of factors that somehow has determined the fact that the Albanian language, as one of the most unique languages in the world, through centuries, has been able to maintain its ability to be written as it is spoken and vice versa. Among these factors we would like to list the followings: (i) the quite large number of phonemes that are present in the Albanian language; (ii) the fact that the Albanian authors, although not being aware of the existence of other alphabets, had agreed to follow a principle according to which for a certain phoneme they use a certain letter and (iii) the distinguished feature of the Albanian language, which has included in its alphabet the so called digraphs (dh, gj, ll, nj, rr, sh, th, xh, zh), a phenomenon that is not encountered in the Italian language and in other languages as well.

In fact, the above perception is strengthen when an Albanian and an Italian as well, come into contact with French, English or German. Those latter ones, have all been derived from Latin and in the course of time, they have developed sounds very much different from those of Latin. These kind of languages have complicated the orthography, by adding such etymological letters, which by some researchers, in a significant number of cases have proven to be a false etymology.

Albanian language and to some extent the Italian language as well (as compared with the above mentioned languages) can be considered as the lucky ones, because to some extent, their phonetic structures corresponds with their graphical structures. Anyway referring to the Albanian language, this does not mean that it has ultimately solved the problem of pronunciation and spelling.

Along with other problems that the language, as an universal and complex science, has in it, pronunciation and spelling are seen as the most complex and difficult ones when it comes in finding a stable solution.

Referring to the Albanian language which is still missing a complete set of pronunciation rules, Prof. Memushaj claims that the processing of the writing rules, followed by a wide spread use of these, is even more difficult and constantly much less usable [2009:25].

Contrary to the Albanian language, the Italian language has a set of spelling and orthographical rules. This norms are very well established by dictionaries, grammar books and recently by the use of electronics orthographical auto correctors. They are also well accepted by all users.

In order to facilitate the spelling, Italian language has made some changes from Latin. For example, one of the problems which has been solved since XVII century is the use of the etymological letter h which occurs during the conjugation of the verb avere (havere) and in some other words, such as uomo (homo), uovo (huovo) and their derivatives, or that of the same etymological letter h, which is present in two consonants th and ph that are originally coming from the ancient Greek words, such as Parthi or Phallo.

However, in the XIX century, the famous Italian writer, G. Pascoli, attempted to restore the letter h, not only at the beginning of the words, but also in the digraphs ch, ph, th, mainly used in Latin and Greek proper nouns.

In our days, the etymological letter h, is maintained during the conjugation of the verb avere in the first, second and third person singular and in the third person plural. However, Magalotti and some other authors, have insisted in forms such as ò, à rather than ho, ha [Migliorini: 628]. The etymological h is no longer in use in the case of uomo and uovo.

Some of the Most Frequent Errors of the Albanian Pupils Studying Italian

In comparison with some other languages, Albanian and Italian languages, can be spelled much more easy. However, this does not mean that one cannot make mistakes. Although these two languages are similar (they have affinities with each other) in their written forms, Albanian speaking people studying Italian, can make mistakes during their spell, even in very high levels.

Albanian alphabet consists of 27 letters and 9 two consonants letters (dh, gj, ll, nj, rr, sh, th, xh, zh), thus providing a unification of the phonemes' number with that of graphemes. The Italian alphabet consists of 21 letters of which, the letter h has no corresponding phoneme.

This grapheme is mainly used as a second element of a two consonant letters (chi, ghi, schi, etc) or in the first, second and third person singulars and the third person plural of the verb avere (ho, hai, ha, hanno), which is inherited from the Latin word habere (havere, XVII Century). It is also used as a mean for telling the difference between words with the same phonic sound, such as ho/o, hai/ai, ha/a/, hanno/anno.

Some of the difficulties that an Albanian has in spelling Italian are related not only with the use of two or three consonant letters (gn, ch, glia, scia, etc), but also with the fact that the same phoneme is realized with different graphemes or even digraphs and trigraphs. For example, the phoneme /k/ is realized by the graphemes

c, ch, q. The phoneme /tʃ/ is realized by the digraphs ci/ce or cia/cie. The phoneme /ʃ/ is realized by the digraphs sci/sce (scena) and the trigraphs scie (scienza). The phoneme /ɲ/ is realized by gli and glia (gigli, foglia), where the latter one is presented in different forms in two words that are originated from each other, such as famiglia and familiare.

Among Albanians who study Italian as a foreign language, often it is seen that the letter i is added behind the phoneme [ɲ] of the Italian language. For example, a word such as compagno is written as compagnio, or the word montagna is written as montagna, etc.

Concerning spelling, an Albanian has another difficulty such as the spelling of double consonants, in words such as sorella, nonno, etc.

In the majority of the cases the Italian double consonants have a distinctive feature as in the case of minimal set of words: sono/sonno, nono/nonno, caro/carro, pala/palla, etc. For example, in the sentence “La bella pecora bela”, the word bela (verb) can be written as bella (adjective). The sentence becomes irregular in terms of its syntax and lexical and has no meaning.

In the Italian language, there are other circumstances when a consonant is doubled. For example, some compound words such as soprattutto, giacché, etc double the consonants t and c. In this case the doubling of the consonants t and c is the result of a typical phenomenon of the Italian language which is known as “raddoppiamento fonosintattico”.

Unfortunately the Italian language has no well defined rules for the doubling of consonants. This is the reason why different authors suggest a very careful listening, which can help in a proper spelling of the double consonants.

In Albanian language there are examples of false minimal set of words, such as mora/morra, Kolë/kollë, palë/pallë, etc [Memushaj 2009:45]. In Albanian language, these examples are much less frequent. Unlike those of Italian language, in Albanian language we are not dealing with a single phoneme which can be spelled either in a short or in a long form, but with two phonemes which differs from each other in terms of their articulation manner and intensity.

In the Albanian language the double consonants are used in a limited number of cases. Prof. Topalli in his monography “Dukuritë Fonetike të Sistemit Bashkëtingëllor të Gjuhës Shqipe” speaks of an early presence of the double consonants (geminate) in the Albanian language and in other Indo-European languages as well. For example, the Albanian word *atta* (which means daddy), has a double consonant t [K. Topalli 2004:58].

Double consonants no longer exist in Albanian, because in time these consonants have resulted in single ones. The exact period when this happened is not known and this is because of the lack of any reliable evidence. The Albanian language is characterized by a tendency to simplify the double consonants that originally have been present in the words taken from other languages it has been in contact to. This can be seen for example with /mm/>/m/ in the case of *flamë* (rrufë) that derives from the Latin word *flamma*.

However, nowadays, in Albanian language we encounter some derived words (in term of the word forming), which are written with the same grapheme doubled (geminate) when they are placed in the boundaries (at the beginning or at the end of the word). As an example we are proposing the followings: *gjembbardhë*, *mossulm* etc. While speaking these two consonants are pronounced as a single one. In Albanian language, the

phenomenon of the double consonants is so rare as to be almost unfixed to the speakers. For an Albanian, the perception by hearing of the long consonants of the Italian languages is very difficult. As a result, the incorrect spelling of double consonants (ss, mm, ll etc) in words such as *cassa*, *mammifero*, *sorella*, is the most frequent mistake made by an Albanian pupil studying Italian.

Another typical case is the spelling of a double consonant, when it is not needed. In words such as: *riuscitto/riuscito*, *dato/datto*, *naturalmente/naturalmente* etc [Sula 2009:65]. Another problem that is seen even in high linguistic levels is the incorrect writing of the “preposizioni articolate” of the Italian language, as in the following examples: *del/dell'*, *al/all'*, *sul/sull'*, etc. It is happening very often that the prepositions *del*/, *al*/, *sul*/ are written as *dell*/, *all*/, *sull*/, in spite of the fact that the following word has a consonant as the starting letter.

Another problem emerging in both languages is the spelling of letters *r* and *rr*. In Albanian language, the letters *r* and *rr* are used for the transcription of two different phonemes [r, R]. In Italian language those letters are different variants to write the same phoneme [r]. Due to the fact that in Albanian language there are a lot of words starting with letter *rr* (*rrugë*, *rrethoj* etc), among Albanians who study Italian, we see a lot of difficulties in the transcription of those Italian words, which are starting with the letter *r* (*ruota*, *regolare*, etc). Somehow the Albanians are affected by the transcription of these words and because of that they tend to write these words using the letter *rr* instead of the letter *r* (*rruota*, *rregolare* etc). However, as R. Ismaili says – in Albanian language there is a growing tendency for the use of letter *r* instead of the letter *rr* and this is something that is happening not only in speaking, but also in writing. This phenomenon is seen in the dialect used in South Albania, mainly to females. According to the cited author this phenomenon is affected also by the contact with some other foreign languages that do not have this phoneme.

Albanian and Italian language share the same problems regarding the transcription of the phonemes [s] and [z]. It happens that in the Albanian speaking language, the voiceless consonant [s] might be pronounced as [z] and this kind of misspelling is also reflected in the writing form of the corresponding word. For example, the word *asgjë* [asjə] is usually pronounced as [azjə] and this latter one is the form in which it is written as well. In the Italian language, there are two phonemes corresponding to each of the letters /s/ and /t/ during their pronunciation (the first ones are the voiced consonants /z/ and /dz/, and the others are the voiceless consonants /s/ and /ts/). The spelling of the consonants /s/ and /z/, sometimes as unvoiced and sometimes as voiced ones, is one of the most frequent mistakes encountered among Albanian who study Italian as a foreign language. Thus, when the pronunciation of the word [‘roza] is preceded by the graphic form *rosa*, probably an Albanian would pronounce it using /s/ instead of /z/. If otherwise, the graphemic form is preceded by the phonetic form [‘roza] it might be written using the consonant /z/ instead that of the correct one /s/.

In his monography “*Gabime të nxënësve dhe studentëve në përvetësimin e gjuhës italiane*”, A. Sula has collected some different examples regarding the exchange of the phonemes [s, z] that is happening during the spelling of the Italian language; some of this are the followings: *messe/mese*, *azino/asino*, etc.

Very often the spelling of the Albanian language is affected by the spelling of foreign words which are brought into Albanian by some other languages. For example, the words that contain the *ks* group have a tendency to be pronounced and spelled as well, using *gz*. Thus we frequently see words such as *eksakt*, *eksekutiv* which are pronounced as [egzakt] and [egzekutiv] respectively; the writing of such words as they are pronounced is a common spelling mistake for the Albanians. In the Italian language the *ks* group is assimilated into a simple *s*, as in the words *esatto*, *esecutivo*, etc.

Affected by their mother tongue, very often the Albanian pupils who study Italian, have a tendency to add the letter n, in the Italian words such as *trasporto*, *trasmettere*, *trascrivere*. Thus these words are written respectively as *transporto*, *transmettere*, *transcrivere*. This is because these words are brought into Albanian by other languages and the Albanian language has maintained their written form as in the following examples: *transport*, *transmetoj*, *transkriptoj*.

In the Albanian language, another difficulty is the alphabetic writing of the words, mainly of those foreign words which contains the diphthong *io*, in which the letter *i* has the same pronunciation as the Albanian consonant *j* or as an Italian semi consonant, as in [aksjon/at'sjone], [pensjon/pensjone], etc. This phenomenon is mainly seen with the first level pupils of the Italian classes. If these mistakes are not treated very carefully at these levels, they can become fossilized errors and as such they can be carried out even in high levels of Italian studies.

Another issue shared between Albanian and Italian language is that for splitting words at the end of a line, especially of those words containing *hiat* at the end of the line. Some Italian words like *zia*, *farmacia*, etc can be split at the end of the line (*zi-a*, *farmaci-a*), but the advice given is to avoid their splitting. This is because a vowel left alone at the beginning of the next line, not only disturbs a continuous reading of the sentence, but what is much more worse, it can be interpreted as an Italian word with its grammatical function (*a/preposition*; *e/o/conjunction*, *i/definite article*).

In case of the Albanian language, a *hiat* which is formed when two vowels come into contact with each other, without forming normal groups (*ia*, *oa*, *aa*) disturbs the rhythm of reading. Although this is not a very frequent phenomenon, to avoid this unpleasant effect for the speaker and the listener as well, the Albanian language has added the consonant /j/ in between the group of vowels.

Thus, in Albanian the word *rrufe-a* is transformed into *rrufe-j-a* and the word *kala-a* is transformed into *kala-j-a*. Although some Albanian words like *shtëpia*, *shamia*, *diell*, *miell*, *diel*, *ziej*, etc are pronounced with an *j*, this consonant is not maintained during their spelling.

This is the reason why for an Albanian, the Italian words *zia*, *pigolio*, *pio*, etc might be pronounced and spelled in the same manner: *zija*, *pigolijo*, *pijo* etc. This is also happening because in the Albanian simple past tense, the vowel *i* of the *ie* group (*ziej*, *ndiej*) is transformed into *j*, (*zjeva*, *ndjeva*).

In some cases, the problems in spelling the Albanian language, arise from the difficulties in listening of those words which contain two similar phonemes in terms of the manner and the place of articulation, but different in terms of their voicing, come into contact with each other (*t/d*, *s/sh*, etc). In Albanian language it happens to have the assimilation of the voiced consonant; for example, the adjective *i argjendtë* which is pronounced as [iargjennt:] is usually spelled as *i argjentë* [Memushaj 2009: 128] .

The correct use of the couples *t/d*, *p/b* etc is difficult not only in Albanian, but almost in all other languages that have those kind of phonemes. For the Albanian pupils studying Italian, the replacement of the voiceless consonant with the voiced one, as in *trepitare/ trepidare* (Sula, 2009:68) is very rare. Such replacements can be considered as mistakes and not as errors.

Another difficulty the Albanian pupils are facing with when spelling Italian, is the use of graphic accent in the words with an ultimate syllable stress, as in the cases of *università*, *parlò*, *prenderò*, *perché*, etc. The use of the graphic accent is obligatory in Italian language, while in Albanian language the graphic accent does not exist.

The same statement is true for the use of the apostrophe. Because of the fact that in the Albanian language, the apostrophe is used only in combined pronouns (t'i, t'ia, t'ua) the correct use of it has passed without being fixed. This is why, the use of an apostrophe among Albanian pupils is often incorrect. It means they use it when it is not needed and vice versa. For example, del'/ del, quel'/ quel etc.

Conclusions

The Albanian language, as a phonetic language plays an important role in spelling of the Italian language. The similarities between Albanian and Italian linguistic systems make it easy for an Albanian pupil to become competent in spelling of the Italian language. In comparison with other languages such as English, German or French, the rhythm at which an Albanian pupils acquire knowledge of the Italian spelling rules is much faster. However, some of the apparent spelling similarities between Albanian and Italian can lead in fossilization of some of the mistakes, as it has been pointed out through the selected examples listed in this paper.

As a conclusion we would like to stress the fact that a comparative analysis regarding the spelling of the Albanian and Italian languages, would have been of much help to the pupils. This can also result in a better competency in both languages.

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